



City of Boston
Boston Landmarks Commission

Christian Science Center Complex

Petition: #223.07

Designation Status: Designated a Boston Landmark in March 2011

National Register of Historic Places inclusion: No

Address: Bounded by Massachusetts Avenue, Huntington Avenue, Clearway Street, and Belvidere Street

Assessors Parcel ID: 0401162000, 0401164000, 0401185000, 0401150000, 0401180000

Architects/Landscape Architects: Franklin I. Welch; Charles Brigham; Solon Spencer Beman; Chester Lindsay Churchill; I.M. Pei; Araldo Cossutta; Vincent Pasciuto-Ponte; Sasaki, Dawson, DeMay

Years built: 1894, 1906, 1934, 1971-72, 1975

Style: Romanesque Revival, Renaissance Revival, Classical Revival, Neoclassical, Modernist

Neighborhood: Fenway



Description

The Christian Science Center Complex consists of three buildings constructed individually in the late 19th through early 20th centuries and a major, late 20th century expansion (the Christian Science Plaza) consisting of three buildings and a landscape design that unifies all six buildings on the property.

The three oldest buildings on the site, constructed of stone, are located in its northwestern section. The Original Mother Church (1894) and The Mother Church Extension (1906) are located near the center of the complex. The Publishing House Building (1934) extends a full city block eastward from Massachusetts Avenue, bounded by Clearway Street on the north.

The modern components of the Christian Science Center Complex are concentrated along Belvidere Street and Huntington Avenue, at the eastern and southern portions of the site. The fan-shaped Sunday School Building (1971), the Colonnade Building (1972), and the Administration Building tower (1972), are constructed of cast-in-place concrete. To blend with the appearance of the Mother Church Extension, the concrete structures were tinted to match the color of The Mother Church's limestone and lightly sandblasted to expose the aggregates in the concrete. The three modern buildings are asymmetrically set around the nearly 700 foot long Reflecting Pool located at the heart of the complex.

History and Significance

The Christian Science Center is historically significant as the world headquarters of The First Church of Christ, Scientist, founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879. Active in fields that were traditionally dominated by men, such as religion, medicine, and publishing, she was one of the most prominent and controversial women of her time. Mary Baker Eddy personally guided the early development of the complex.

The construction of the Original Mother Church and its Extension established the site as the center of the Christian Science movement, while the addition of the Publishing House marked the rapid expansion of the religion into other arenas and began to create a more comprehensive urban landscape. The three earlier buildings are the nucleus of an urban plaza influenced by the City Beautiful movement of the early 20th century and served as models for Christian Science architecture throughout the country.

The Christian Science Center Complex is a renowned work of architecture and landscape design, comprising individually distinctive elements that together form a rich, cohesive whole that transformed and elevated its urban setting. As an ensemble it is a work of vision and brilliance, important to the 19th and 20th century development of the city of Boston, the New England region, and the nation. Designed by prominent architects and landscape architects of the late 19th through late 20th centuries, including Charles Brigham, Solon S. Beman, I.M. Pei, Araldo Cossutta, Hideo Sasaki, and Stuart Dawson, the buildings and landscape represent fine and often exceptional examples of period architectural design and craftsmanship, and together present a picture of the evolution of a religious complex.

The property represents an extraordinary example of modernist urban planning and architectural design that amplifies its historic context. The three major components of the complex – The Mother Church buildings, the Publishing House Building, and the 1970s buildings and landscape – remain exceptionally intact.